



Taro Mortar

Date

mid 20th Century

Medium

Wood

Description

In the Huon Gulf region, the inhabitants of the Tami Islands are known for their distinctive style of wood carving, often referred to as the Tami style. This unique art style is distinguished by the use of a carving method known as high-relief carving—in which designs are carved into the wood and protrude from the background. This method of carving requires meticulous planning beforehand and great skill tool manipulation to achieve desired effect. Mortars—an object type common to the entire world due to their efficiency at pulverizing foods, pigments, and more—were a mainstay in the Tami carving region. This particular mortar was reserved for the pulverization of the otherwise unwieldy taro root, a staple

food for these islanders. The carved border designs on the sides and opening of this taro mortar are indicative of Tami style carvings. Some researchers suggest the side designs on similar taro mortar could symbolize a kind of chest ornament worn by men in the Huon Gulf region. The ornamental segment at the base of the mortar would have most likely been used a decorative handle. The Tami are brilliant seamen, which allows them to extensively trade their craft goods with the neighboring islands—such as New Guinea, Rook, and Siassi. It is no surprise to find Tami style goods spread over large areas through trade. Due to social restrictions, the distinctive carving style of the Tami remains confined to their community of wood carvers. If any individuals outside the community used a style other than their own the act would constitute as a severe offence.

Dimensions

14 × 5 1/2 × 5 in. (35.6 × 14 × 12.7 cm)